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Coping with Obstacles in Drama-Based ESL Teaching: A Nonverbal Approach

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Introduction

After several years as an ESL teacher, I became aware of a barrier that, at times, prevented clear communication in my classes. A particular situation made me realize that misunderstandings arose because we had different perceptions of one another's nonverbal language. Not only did I speak a different verbal language from my students, we also related quite differently in the area of nonverbal communication. I recall very clearly the incident that first brought this to my attention. I mention it here as it is symbolic of many intercultural misunderstandings that arise in second-language work.

We gathered as a class at a downtown shopping mall to begin an activity in which the students would take pictures of local people and buildings. The students did not arrive all at once. The group, as it grew, began spreading out to the point where local merchants in our meeting area were concerned that we would block access to their shops. I noticed people's growing annoyance and I began to feel anxious, no doubt giving off signs of tension to my group. In an effort to diffuse a potentially difficult situation, I began gesturing to the group (a direct pushing motion) to move back and allow a passage way for shoppers. My students paid little attention to me.

Many of the students I teach come from Japan, Mexico, and other densely populated countries; what I and the others had perceived to be an overcrowded gathering area was perhaps not so to them. In fact, it was only later that term, when the group became more articulate, that I discovered that the gesture I had so fixedly been employing in my efforts to move them back was all the while being misread by them as saying either "Stay where you are" or "Keep quiet!" No matter how animated I became with this gesture that I perceived to signify "Move back," their cultural reading of my sign was telling them a

different story. This kind of misunderstanding happens quite often in the second-language classroom where nonverbal language is a key means of communication.

The importance of nonverbal language

I have become intrigued by the sorts of "dialogues" that take place in the silent interactions: the shifts, the glances, and the nods of the diverse groups of people with whom I have been working so closely these past ten years. Through my research at the Department of Theatre, I have been studying how drama in ESL (DIESL) might be helpful in foregrounding this nonverbal aspect of human interrelation. At the same time, I have become aware of how drama activities enhance language learning and promote intercultural awareness.

This chapter details aspects of my research and cites current findings. An important resource that prompted my research is the curriculum for the English Language Centre, where I have been teaching for seven years. In the course objectives, the curriculum requires that students should have an "awareness of nonverbal communication" (ELPI Level 410 Curriculum, 2000, p. 7). This goal is one of a wide variety of benchmarks that include such objectives as "the student can begin to use the present perfect" (p. 3) and "the student is able to instruct others to do something" (p. 22). Whereas most of the benchmarks are easy enough to address, identify, and teach, the nonverbal curriculum goal has troubled me for some time, and it, too, has played a part in driving my research.

Many current ESL textbooks affirm the importance of nonverbal awareness in the language learning process, yet only go part way in examining this topic. For example, this question is posed in a chapter entitled "Body Language" (Naber, 1998) in a text intended for student use: "Can body language sometimes create communication problems for newcomers? Explain with examples" (p. 95). Such a discussion, although important, is difficult to approach without real-life examples. In my studies, therefore, I have been investigating how drama in ESL might provide a method for such discovery and discussion.

The art of gesture lies at the very core of human existence and plays a part in every face-to-face human interaction. Canadian Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche, a caregiving organization for people with special needs, speaks of the significance of gesture when he writes:

I have in some small way learned to inhabit my body and to see it not just as a channel for therapy but as a way of revealing my heart and being in communion with others.... This communion demands respectful listening to the nonverbal language of the other person. In the world of friendship and relationship, gestures normally precede the word. The word is there to confirm the gesture and give it its signification. (1998, pp. 78-79)

Another author who is conscious of the power of the nonverbal in human relating is Tom Harpur (1994):

From something as near-universal as the simple act of shaking hands to the pat of encouragement or congratulation on the shoulder ... touch is obviously much more than a meaningless or impotent gesture. It is a means of communication, an expression of solidarity, a bonding of persons and communities, and a profound visual symbol of an unseen transmission of healing energy and power ... an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. (p. 42)

Elements of the nonverbal in diesl

Gestures, or "manual symbols" (McNeill, 1985), are defined as more than physical movements; they are "referential acts [that] convey meaning, depict events, and represent ideas. They specify and often clarify verbal references and they can denote meanings that may not be in the accompanying words" (Bavelas, Chovil, et al., 1992, pp. 470-471).

Researchers speak of such terms as "mirroring" to describe the listener's behavior as he "mirror images" the expression of the speaker or "motor mimicry" as a phenomenon of expression observed by Bavelas, Black, et al. (1988). Both observations are of particular interest to me as they can be explored through drama activities.

Theater practitioners are aware of the importance of gesture in conveying messages. Peter Brook has been stirring the intercultural pot in his remarkable theatrical productions since the 1970s, demonstrating how drama holds rich and promising opportunities for our journeys of understanding. Teachers in intercultural and interlinguistic education have a great deal to infuse into their work from Brook's developments and others' theatrical explorations. Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold was an early innovator in intercultural theater. Meyerhold used the nonverbal as a transformation medium—that is to say, he used the theatrical style of one culture (for example, Noh theater from Japan) as a way to open up new meanings for a western European audience. Meyerhold wrote of provoking "an effective reflex in the spectator which is not necessarily conveyed through intellectual channels, but which relies on sensorial sensitivity, on kinaesthetics.... The essence of human relationships," he reminds us, "is determined by gestures, poses, glances and silences. Words alone cannot say everything" (Braun, 1969, p.155).

Finally, in terms of drama in education research, Betty Jane Wagner (1998a) discusses the role of gesture in language learning:

Our first experiences both before and after birth were centered in our bodies. As a newborn, we knew when we were hungry, dry, comfortable, held in strong and calm arms. Even then, we were aware of language-not as a system that encodes meanings, but as a phenomenon of consummate interest. As an infant, every part of our body was engaged in making sense of our world-in constructing meaning. Words surrounded us, but they were not a predominant way of knowing. Before we could talk, we used gestures to communicate. (p. 63)

Wagner (1998a; see also in this book) describes how children's understanding depends on enactive knowing or kinesthetic experience. According to Wagner, "Dramatic play and drawing are ways children enter imaginatively into their worlds. In both, they are engaging in symbolism" (p. 66). This symbolic play is readily employed by students in the workshops that will be described in this chapter, and it is as crucial to their explorations in their new language as it is to children learning their first language (Bolton, 1984; Arming, 1994; Brown, 1994).

The nonverbal drama workshop

Prior to my graduate studies, I had explored the possibility of introducing drama to the ESL classroom but experienced only limited success. One of the reasons for my lack of success was that I was inviting the students to engage primarily in information-sharing activities. Kao and O'Neill (1998) explain

that many ESL teachers who attempt drama in their classrooms restrict their efforts to the simplest and least motivating and enriching approaches, such as asking students to recite prepared scripts for role play. The emphasis has tended to be on the accuracy of the language ... rather than on the meaning that is being conveyed (p. 3).

Recent innovations, such as role (or process) drama (see also Liu in this book), offer alternative drama strategies that have a task orientation. Employing a variety of drama techniques, the participants in a process drama are collectively telling a story that is shaped in an unfolding and organic way by the participants. "Language acquisition," Kao and O'Neill (1998) explain, "arises from the urge to do things with words, and this need becomes paramount in process drama, when participants are required to manipulate the dramatic circumstances to achieve their own goals" (p. 4).

In general, when I lead groups I have not met before, the host teacher is present and, in most cases, takes part. In this way, that teacher may become an advocate for drama strategies. Most often, I teach beginner or intermediate students in these workshops, and the introductory activities I choose are dependent on their level of language ability. With the upper-level groups, I usually conduct a short discussion. This takes the language focus away from me and puts it on them as they talk about their observations. I follow this with a physical warm-up such as "Follow the Leader" with musical accompaniment and plenty of group movement. With the beginner-level students, I begin with a simple physical warm-up activity, and the reflection on how we communicate through gesture follows.

Introduction: A Group Discussion

Running time: 10 minutes.

Activity: Pair discussion; whole group discussion.

Focus: To get students thinking about the relevance of the work to their own language learning experience.

Questions: "In what ways do people communicate gesturally?" and "Have you noticed ways that people in Canada gesture differently from people in your country?"

Activity 1: Group Warm-up

Running time: 10 minutes.

Activity: "Follow the Leader"; whole group.

Focus: To introduce physical work to help make students comfortable with one another.

Questions: "What sorts of things do we have to think about when we lead?"

Activity 2: Physical Name Game

Running time: 15 minutes.

Activity: Standing as a group in a circle, one person introduces him/herself and adds one action that describes him/herself. Everyone repeats that action and name.

Focus: To give them words with which they are familiar (their names) and invite them to add a movement that helps them to remember classmates. To have students play physically with familiar language and at the same time provide an ice-breaker that helps them learn each others' names.

Question: "What sorts of things have we learned about each other?"

Activity 3: Passing the Claps

Running time: 15 minutes.

Activity: A clap is passed sequentially around the circle; the clap is then passed between A and B who must now clap together, then B and C clap together, and so on around the circle. Once a rhythm is established, extra claps can be introduced by the leader.

Focus: To work on group rhythm and establish eye contact with classmates.

Question: "In what ways did you communicate to your partner that you were making a connection?" and "What were some of the difficulties you had with this game?"

Activity 4: Circle Cross

Running time: 12 minutes.

Activity: Students are still in a circle and must negotiate by eye contact only their exchange of places. Only one pair of students may exchange places at any given time.

Focus: To encourage participants to take a risk using only nonverbal communication.

Questions: "What sorts of risks were involved in your deciding to make a move?" and "Can you think of some reasons that prevent us from going?"

Activity 5: What are you doing?

Running time: 15 minutes.

Activity: Person steps into the middle of circle and mimes an action. Whole group supports that player by mirroring his/her action. When students in circle have discovered the name for that action, they turn to a neighbor and name it. Person miming action says the action out loud, which is the cue for another student to step in and quickly begin to mime a new action. Game continues until all have taken a turn in the middle.

Focus: Students develop improvisational skills and learn to listen and react in a spontaneous way. New vocabulary is given a context.

Question: "How is this game similar to learning a language?"

Activity 6: Group Mirrors

Running time: 15 minutes.

Activity: First the students work in pairs mirroring each other. A leads and B follows. Reverse. Next the whole group is in a circle mirroring together. A classmate leaves the room, and the circle selects a leader and begins mirroring. The classmate returns to guess the leader. Repeat.

Focus: Connecting and helping a disparate group of students engage with each other safely, while freeing them to interact physically.

Questions: "When was it easy to tell who we were following and when was it more difficult?" and "What kinds of clues helped you to discover the leader?"

Although these activities are primarily nonverbal, the instructions introduce students to new words and the reflective questions provide expanded language opportunities for the participants (Morgan & Saxton, 1991). The importance of establishing shared experiences through the reflective questions and subsequent storytelling allows the focus to be on making meaning (Kao & O'Neill, 1998, p. 3). For example, in activity 2 the actions students choose to share often provide a glimpse into their cultures, personalities, and interests. In one class alone we discovered, in this activity, a Thai dance step, Tae Kwon Do techniques, and how fishing in Japan is different from that in Canada.

Clown Workshop, Part One

I have invited several guests into my classroom to work with my students in the theatrical frame: mask makers, puppeteers, and actors from plays we have seen. The guest who elicited the most enthusiastic response was one who said few words at all, yet managed to engage the group thoroughly. Shannan Calcutt's award winning one-woman show *Burnt Tongue* was performed at the Phoenix Theatre at the University of Victoria (October 1999). My ESL students attended her performance, then she came into our classroom the following day, with a workshop lasting an hour and a half.

Physicality is key to working in the role of a clown. Since the 1980s, ESL educators have been actively aware of the importance of movement for language acquisition. Asher's Total Physical Response theory (TPR), for example, examines physical aspects of language learning and how ESL students can develop language without engaging in oral practice (Lightbown & Spada, 1993). Drama educators have always been conscious of the role physicality has on learners. "Not only do expression and gesture help to 'fill out' the words we are saying but they often express thoughts and feelings of which we may not be aware" (Morgan & Saxton, 2000, p. 10). Contemporary research supports the claim that students can learn to develop their kinesthetic intelligence (Gardner, 1983). The latest brain research, Brown and Pleydell (1999) remind us, presents strong evidence that movement (lots of it) plays an essential role in thinking, learning, and sensory integration. A young child is most likely to recall a new word, concept, or sequence of information when movement has been part of the learning experience. ESL students can, in the same way, maximize their learning through movement.

Activity 1: Jacques a dit (a variation of Simon Says)

Running time: 10 minutes.

Activity: Students move about while leader provides rhythm by shaking a tambourine. While moving, students are invited to do an action. They are instructed not to partake if the action is not preceded by the words "Jacques a dit". If students made a mistake, they are gently tapped with a stick and they sit down.

Focus: To get the students loosened up through movement, to explore the concept of impulse, and to build vocabulary (reach for the sky, etc.).

Activity 2: Emotional Range

Running time: 15 minutes.

Activity: Leader writes an emotion on the board, then has the class add many more. Students are invited, through movement, to explore all together, and in their own time, the different levels of intensity of each listed emotion.

Focus: Students observe one another and interact as a group, without being in performance mode. Together they explore how emotion is physicalized, how emotion shifts physical interpretation, and they explore the meaning of words used to express emotions. Students can relate to the emotions, body language, and expression, all representing a sort of international language.

Activity 3: Crossing the Stage

Running time: 15 minutes.

Activity: Students are invited to walk, one at a time, across the room, having decided in advance what emotion and what intensity to convey. Audience responds by saying the feeling words that the "performance" generates.

Focus: A gentle introduction to performance and risk-taking, with an opportunity to comment through feedback and learn to describe and interpret physical gestures in the target language.

Activity 4: Clown Turns

Running time: 3 minutes each.

Activity: One student is invited to go in front of the group, and he/she puts on the clown nose and a hat of his/her choice and "enters." The student is asked to establish contact with each member of the audience in an honest way. Then, as he/she leaves, to look back at the group once more.

Focus: Both audience and performer are expected to commit to the interaction and support one another in order to expand the possibilities for communication. The goal is to create a meaningful conversation without using any words at all.

The clown workshop sets up a safe environment, allowing students to take risks in front of others. At the same time, it demands support from classmates. Although there was minimal reflection, these activities generated new language that was noticeable in later classes. The observation of the workshop leader:

The amazing thing for me is how the language limits [the ESL students], and in clown, we no longer needed the language. They said so much without using words at all. In fact, the entire room seemed to shift focus. In clown, immediately, they understood, it wasn't work anymore, they were connected, all part of the same world. (Calcutt, 1999)

Clown Workshop, Part Two

A year later I accompanied Shannan on her visit to another ESL class in our program, one led by a colleague. This group, like mine the year before, was limited in terms of verbal language competence. They were, as their teacher described them, an extraordinarily outgoing group, full of imagination and experience, and, like the earlier class, they represented a variety of nationalities: Turkish, Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean, and Mexican. For the teacher, it was important that her students saw the benefit of the workshop on their language acquisition process. For the first ten minutes, we talked about acting as an expression of feelings, about taking risks when an impulse was felt, and how the clown's goal is to take this impulse to the extreme. We reminded the students that this work was about observing body language in ourselves and others. Unlike the previous workshop, my role this time was as an observer.

Our objectives for this workshop were the same as for the last: to use clown techniques to explore the "physicality of language" (Morgan & Saxton, 2000) and to help students converse on an empathic or feeling level (Wagner, 1998b; Arnold, 1999) where social learning is seen to be concurrent with language learning. Through the introduction of simple drama/clown techniques, we were hoping to draw the attention of the students to the nonverbal ways in which they convey a great amount of meaning. Morgan and Saxton (2000) remind us that about 80 percent of meaning in our communications is paralinguistic-"conveyed by such things as tone, pitch, pace, emphasis and body language-facial expression, gesture, body stance and movement" (p. 8).

In this second workshop, it was interesting but not surprising to see that, from the outset, the students had arranged themselves by ethnic group. This is often the case with groups at the start of the work, and it is, in fact, a primary reason for getting them moving, circulating, and interacting, actions that serve to break through those ethnic barriers. The

activities not only stressed the importance of the clown being committed to the work but reminded us that as audience members we needed to return that attention. This raised the stakes for the student performing in clown and for those observing.

As the activities progressed, Shannan made noticeable efforts to hold the students to their end of the bargain: to support their classmates in role. For example, when one of the students in the clown "mask" made an effort to look at another but this was not honored by the recipient, Shannan firmly reminded the student audience of their responsibility. She was equally demanding of the student in role as clown: that he/she be honest and committed to the interchange. This was to create a tension that fueled the interactions and held the interest. It was interesting to observe how the pressure of the theatrical rules held their attention.

The gentle tapping of "Jacques a dit" allowed Shannan to establish her role as director for the work that was to come. To be asked to do something over again, she assured the students, would not be perceived as failure. The "Emotional Range" activity reinforced this valuing of varying levels of success; students learn to trust their work and subsequently commit to it more readily. I also noticed that in "Emotional Range" students are sharing something every culture understands-that is to say, the universality of feeling.

The final exercise, "Clown Turns," was the most challenging. It provided the opportunity for students to have a deeper and longer nonverbal interchange. The demanding attention to both the message given and its reception gave the work the seriousness it needed. Two instructions from Shannan that seemed to aid the students were "Do not do, just be ... do not act!" and "The mask is not to hide behind but to reveal yourself through."

Two examples of this work: "Jose" from Latin America, and "Grace" a Korean woman (names are pseudonyms in the interest of confidentiality), took part in the "Clown Turns" activity. There was a palpable tension among those of us seated on the floor as Jose prepared "backstage." A reliable framework for the task was securely in place, and this seemed to reassure the participants on both sides. When Jose appeared, wearing a hat and the red nose, he looked completely different, and our students reacted with audible surprise. How he had been transported! Instantly a hush fell on the whole room, and I had the sense that this reaction surprised him. Shannan insisted on his looking at her (she was the only one to speak) and once she could see his commitment, she invited him to begin his turns. Jose made a deep connection with each of his classmates. With some he

laughed, and with others his expression became serious. For the most part, the students were as engaged as he. One student shied away from his gaze, and Shannan reminded everyone of the rules, which heightened the tension even more. When Jose left the stage area, a sigh of relief was breathed by the group, followed by laughter. It was as if they had been holding their collective breath throughout. When Jose reentered "out of role," Shannan immediately went up to him and they embraced, a natural reaction to the intensity of his contribution. Her hug "spoke" for us all. For some time afterwards, the students responded to the experience by talking about what had taken place in pairs, and then in the wider group. This pair talk (in English) allows students to debrief and to test out their vocabulary before committing themselves to speaking in the public forum. The importance of a certain amount of side chat is a key technique to the development of individual confidence.

Grace was outgoing and had entertained the group by her antics in the previous exercise. However, Shannan did not allow her to resort to cliché acting even for an instant. From the moment Grace appeared, we could all sense her discomfort in her role. Shannan held her stare for a much longer period of time than she had with Jose. Grace was overly concerned with making all of us laugh. I sensed that the group's refusal to join in meant that they had come to expect a deeper connection, like the one they had just experienced with Jose. Then, in an almost magical moment, Grace allowed herself a true expression, and there was no turning back. This time the group "sigh" happened with the actor facing us. People sensed that Grace was having difficulty holding the role, and so they supported her by giving her serious looks in return. By the time she had gone around the circle, a conversation of a completely different sort had transpired. It had shifted to a meaningful and deeper level, free of cliché. Again, when Grace returned, Shannan embraced her.

In a post-workshop interview, Shannan explained, "The goal is not to make the audience laugh, which, of course, is the immediate thought when putting on a clown nose and standing in front of people. When Grace got past the "show," she was completely beautiful to watch. The audience feels what the clown is feeling. We want to see the clown's struggle, see the clown thinking on the outside, sharing her feelings of inadequacy. It's a two-way mirror-there is no fourth wall; we are engaged in the same world" (Calcutt, 2001). Grace was able to use her English to articulate how difficult the experience had been, and yet how satisfied she was with her achievement. Powerful emotional experiences often

release a competency in English of which neither the teacher nor the student has been previously aware. It is the need to talk about what has happened that gives students the capacity to find the words.

These approaches to ESL teaching through "silent" drama are significant. Kao and O'Neill (1998) speak of entry level ESL students and the importance of accessing their nonverbal language in drama work. "Beginning level L2 (second language) learners," the authors note, "have very limited proficiency, and thus verbal communication is almost impossible in drama ... linguistic items presented to the learners prior to the drama and an emphasis on nonverbal responses in the activities, become very important" (p.127). My investigation into nonverbal communication, paradoxical as that may seem for a language teacher, has provided me with new possibilities for the problems that I have encountered in working with adult students in DIESL (Drama in English as a Second Language).

GENERAL PROBLEMS WITH USING DRAMA IN ESL

I have identified a number of principal problems encountered when using drama in language learning. I base these conclusions on my experience as well as that of my colleagues, and from my own experiences as a language learner. The first problem is that classes typically have a diverse blend of cultures and language groups. Students come from Mainland China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Mexico, Turkey, Colombia, and Brazil and often are all together in a class. Hall (1982) notes the diversities of comfort levels in different cultures with regard to areas such as spatial awareness, privacy, social status, and utterance. ESL teacher interviews confirm that students from certain cultures may interact in a demonstrative manner, whereas others have a tendency to internalize. Creating a balance when faced with such a potpourri of cultural diversities is no small undertaking and often a cause for concern for those who teach in the ESL environment.

Secondly, the students are adults who bring a diversity of experiences with them; many are already graduates of postsecondary programs in their own countries, and many are on temporary professional development leave from careers. Therefore, in my classroom, there exists considerable life experience, and this creates a certain imbalance in many activities that we do. Some are comfortable with an interactive approach, others not at all.

It has been my experience that such cultural and biographical diversity, rich as it can be, at times creates a certain degree of tension in the ESL classroom.

The third problem is that with such sophisticated backgrounds, students are not always readily tolerant of what they initially perceive to be "child's play." Problem four is that many of my students come from education systems where arts in the classroom have little place, and this adds to the difficulties. It is my understanding that although students have often been audience to performances, they have rarely been creators of them. The fifth problem is that students from many of our cultural groups see theater as something that is done only by professionals and they do not see how they can acquire (or already possess) such skills. A sixth problem is that drama is too often seen by my students as "frill," something to do after class or with the few remaining moments in class, rather than as a valid learning event that can be introduced at the core of the work. As a result of these perceptions, students' initial work in drama is often superficial and clichéd.

The penultimate problem I identify here concerns performance expectations. When inviting students to work in our art form in the ESL classroom, the perception on their part is that "doing theater or drama" means creating a performance and being onstage. The mere thought of such a requirement can send shudders down student spines! The inevitable tension that ensues can destroy any quality in the students' work. I have found that with lowerlevel learners in particular, creativity can be choked once the work becomes performance-driven. With the correct approach, there is undoubtedly a place for theater with advanced ESL groups. In fact, my colleague Jane Leavitt successfully demonstrated this in her graduate work where her research (1997) shows the linguistic merits to be found in presenting plays: memorization, group work, pronunciation, and cultural awareness, to name a few. However, my research focus has a process orientation for the less accomplished English language speaker.

Lastly, our students are generally more comfortable with teacher-driven classes because of their own education experiences prior to arriving at our language school. Of course, drama negates this approach. In fact it lies at the very heart of classroom drama that the teacher becomes cocreator with his/her students. Arriving in an already foreign learning environment, our students are initially reluctant to become engaged when invited to do so. This final problem is common for many ESL teachers who attempt to teach with a communicative methodology. In ESL pedagogy in recent years there has been a

documented shift toward both affective learning and communicative strategies because the evidence shows teacher-driven teaching methodology to be much less effective (Nunan & Richards, 1990). Nevertheless, the students' ingrained behavior and learning styles from their first language culture are firmly set. My interviews show that to almost all these students, the "teacher-dominated language classroom" still feels the most comfortable.

Just as teacher-driven methodologies in ESL can have limited success, so too is drama teaching that is teacher-centered equally unsuccessful. Kao and O'Neill (1998) point out that the kind of teaching where the teacher instructs and watches the students "do" (such as the restaurant menu/waiter scene that ESL teachers know all too well), "prevents learners from actively participating in the classroom conversation " (p. 109). In essence, there is nothing there that comes from the students themselves. When the work is student-centered, the difference is clear. This was certainly the case in Shannan's workshops. Perhaps the reactions to the work is best summed up in the words of a Taiwanese student: "I could not always understand but I could read the body and I understand" (Student journal, 1999).

ESL teachers I have been interviewing share the students' enthusiasm, saying that they feel closer to their students when engaged with them in the dramatic frame. They appreciate the openness and caring such an awareness brings to their classes. The host teacher for Shannan's workshop noted that the workshop went "far deeper" than she had expected it to go. She commented on how this work gave her the opportunity to see her students differently, allowing them to cross cultural lines and connect emotionally. This particular teacher also commented on the spirit of trust that this workshop helped build in her classroom. She observed that "you need human competence and sensitivity to work this way because classroom safety is the most important issue."

BENEFITS OF DIESL

My research has helped me to identify a number of ways that nonverbal' drama activities may benefit the ESL classroom (though this is by no means an exhaustive list), and the reader may see these as a viable way of addressing the problems I have previously discussed.

1. Students are able to express themselves in ways other than through words. When words do not come easily, nonverbal opportunities allow students to reveal themselves and learn about others in more direct and intuitive ways. The sign (gesture or facial expression or posture) is often less abstract than the word.
2. Teachers are also able to use nonverbal cues to demonstrate caring and concern for students in a way that language does not.
3. Nonverbal activities provide an excellent means of releasing the stress of language learning. The atmosphere of play prevails, and yet important learning is going on (Bolton, 1984).
4. Students, often hesitant to speak out, can become confident when the language expectation is removed. They will take an initial step (in its most literal sense) more readily than they will utter an initial word.
5. "Total Physical Response," an established tool in ESL methodology, is enhanced through drama activities. The body is as much a part of thinking as is the mind, and nonverbal activities force everyone, teacher included, to "listen" in a different way. All become more astute readers of sign and readers of the body (Morgan & Saxton, 2000).
6. Power dynamics shift in all drama work as the teacher becomes a participant alongside the students. This "shift" enables teachers to be seen in ways that mitigate the sense of authority that can intimidate students. As well, students can reveal expertise previously hidden by verbal (or sometimes cultural) domination of other less inhibited members of the class.
7. Nonverbal drama activities transfer directly to verbal ones, and subsequent verbal interchanges are triggered by these nonverbal activities. ESL teachers need to be reminded that all words begin as impulses that are stimulated by attitudes and feelings that demand to be expressed (Brook, 1968).

Current ESL research points to the benefit of creating a communicative learning environment for students, one in which all aspects of language are experienced (Nunan, 1999). Lightbown and Spada (1993) describe Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as:

based on the premise that successful language learning involves not only a knowledge of the structures and forms of a language, but also the functions and purposes that a language serves in different communicative settings. This approach to teaching emphasizes the communication of meaning over the practice and manipulation of grammatical forms. (pp. 119-120)

Drama is by nature social, communicative, interactive, and gestural. Ongoing educational research demonstrates that ours is a world of "multiple perspectives" (Wagner, 1998a), and drama in ESL allows for an examination of those diverse perspectives. As educators, we need to concern ourselves with building nurturing learning environments for our students, always mindful that language mastery involves more than learning a series of words or grammar functions.

My research illustrates how students are able to learn about one another through interactive drama activities. A natural curiosity exists with any group newly formed, but this is heightened in the globally diverse groups described here. Once a spark of interest is ignited by introducing activities like the ones described in the workshops, a genuine caring begins to emerge in the class, a concern for one another and a desire for deeper connecting. Nonverbal activities allow for this exploration in an accessible, unthreatening, and uncomplicated way. They "make visible the invisible," in the words of the great mime, Marcel Marceau (1998). As a natural progression, the shared explorative environment leads to increased language use. It is not as contradictory as it may first appear to suggest that, in order to arrive at language proficiency, ESL teachers should consider the other dimensions of language that surround all spoken text, especially when the dramatic process can address such a broad range of learning styles.

When sharing this work with teachers of ESL, I often sense that although they enjoy drama activities and see their value as group "ice breakers," they question the benefits of the activities in terms of language enhancement or enrichment. As well, many say they are lacking in the flair it takes to carry these off effectively, dismissing themselves as "just not dramatic enough." These are certainly viable concerns, and they are also, not surprisingly, expressed initially by the students. Teachers and ESL students clearly value activities that have strong and clear language outcomes. As an ESL teacher myself, I certainly appreciate the priority we give to explicit language learning, but I also see its limitations when practiced exclusively. I have shown here that language involves much more than verbal mastery. As ESL programs are becoming more communicative in nature, as our pedagogy is shifting its focus, drama offers new opportunities for learning.

In the same way that Wagner (1998a) found her students to be more inspired to write once they had been engaged in the dramatic frame, so my students are keen to discuss what they have experienced and they are rarely at a loss for words. Although they often do not speak when directly involved in the activities, they certainly speak enthusiastically in the reflection time. Day (1990) points to the importance of student motivation in language learning, stating that "among the most widely discussed topics in second language learning is the role of motivation in the successful acquisition of the target language" (Day, 1990, p. 53). Not only are students self-motivated through drama work,

but the social climate of the class is warmed significantly by their involvement with one another, and bridges are built for future exercises and classwork.

A further research project could be to compare a drama ESL class with a non-drama ESL class to determine which communicates more freely and develops a more supportive and communicative classroom environment. In his "Hope is Vital" project, Michael Rohd (1998) describes such an environment as a "safe space," "a working environment where participants feel comfortable playing and honestly sharing their thoughts and feelings" (p. 5). It has been my experience that when students no longer feel pressured to speak the language and when the focus is placed on nonverbal relating rather than on sentence mastery, an environment of safety and trust is created. A universal feature of all of the Arts is that mistakes are readily accepted (and expected) as an essential part of the creative process. The culturally imposed expectation to "always be right" is lifted and the mood lightens noticeably. With the fear of failure gone, the brain naturally absorbs more efficiently (Hart, 1983). Consequently, the language that is generated comes from the students' desire to speak rather than the requirement to do so.

Psychologist Herbert Clark (cited in Bruner, 1990) employs the term "folk psychology" to describe the examination of all that is public and communal in human interaction, a process that he equates with being performers in a play.

When we enter human life, it is as if we walk onstage into a play whose enactment is already in progress—a play whose somewhat open plot determines what parts we may play and toward what denouements we may be heading. Others on stage already have a sense of what the play is about, enough of a sense to make negotiation with a newcomer possible. (pp. 33-34)

In a sense, our ESL students are newcomers who have all stepped onto that stage together. As their teachers, we already have a sense of what the play is about. It is our responsibility to make the negotiations and the conversations possible.

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